

# Safer drinking water for all Europeans

The right to access essential services of good quality, including water, is one of the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) unanimously endorsed by Heads of State or Government at the Gothenburg Summit. Today's legislative proposal aims to guarantee this right and thereby responds to the first-ever successful European Citizens' Initiative, "[Right2Water](#)", that gathered 1.6 million signatures in support of improving access to safe drinking water for all Europeans. In addition this proposal seeks to empower consumers ensuring that water suppliers provide consumers with clearer information on water consumption, on the cost structure as well as on the price per litre allowing a comparison with the price of bottled water. This will be contributing to the environmental goals of reducing unnecessary plastic use and limiting the EU's carbon footprint, as well as to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"Citizens have made their voice loud and clear through the European Citizens' Initiative, calling for action to have a guaranteed access to safe drinking water. We have heard and heeded their call and carried out a thorough analysis of our existing legislation. Today we are therefore proposing to modernise our EU law, improving the quality of drinking water and increasing the access of citizens where it matters most. Together we can and must protect the health and safety of our citizens."*

Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for growth, jobs, investment and competitiveness said: *"With this proposal we facilitate the transition to a circular economy, helping Member States manage drinking water in a resource-efficient manner. It implies reduction of energy use and unnecessary water loss. Thanks to increased transparency it will also empower consumers and push them towards more sustainable choices, for example using tap water."*

Most people living in the EU enjoy very good access to high quality drinking water. This results from long standing EU legislation protecting Europeans ensuring that they have access to high quality drinking water. The Commission wants to make sure that this high quality is preserved in the long run. The rules which the Commission proposes to update today will **improve water quality and safety** by adding new and emerging substances to the list of criteria for determining water safety (such as legionella and chlorate). These additions take account of the latest scientific knowledge and recommendations of the World Health Organisation.

The new rules will require Member States to **improve access for all people, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups** who currently have difficult access to drinking water. In practice, that means setting up equipment for access to drinking water in public spaces, launching campaigns to inform citizens about the quality of their water and encouraging administrations and public buildings to provide access to drinking water.

Another important change in the legislation will give the public easy, user-

friendly – including online – access to **information about the quality and supply of drinking water** in their living area, improving confidence in tap water. According to [estimates](#), the new measures would reduce potential health risks associated with drinking water from 4% to below 1%.

Lower consumption of bottled water can in addition **help households in Europe save more than €600 million per year**. With improved confidence in tap water, citizens can also contribute to reducing plastic waste from bottled water, including marine litter. Plastic bottles are one of the most common single use plastic items found on European beaches. With the update of the Drinking Water Directive, the Commission takes with an important legislative step towards implementing the [EU Plastics Strategy](#) presented on 16 January 2018.

Better management of drinking water from Member States will **avoid unnecessary loss of water** and contribute to **lowering the CO<sub>2</sub> footprint**. The proposal will therefore make a meaningful contribution to reaching the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 6) and the Paris Agreement objectives on climate change. The new risk-based approach to safety will help to carry out safety checks in a more targeted manner where risks are higher. In parallel, the Commission will also accelerate work on standardisation to ensure that construction products in the water sector across the EU's internal market, such as pipes and tanks, do not pollute drinking water.

## **Background**

Most people living in the EU already enjoy very good access to high quality drinking water, especially compared to some other regions in the world, thanks in part to over 30 years of EU legislation on drinking water quality. This policy ensures that water intended for human consumption can be consumed safely, protecting citizens' health. The main pillars of the policy are to:

- Ensure that drinking water quality is controlled through standards based on the latest scientific evidence;
- Secure an efficient and effective monitoring, assessment and enforcement of drinking water quality;
- Provide consumers with adequate, timely and appropriately information.

The revision of the Drinking Water Directive 98/83/EC was included in the Commission's 2017 Work Programme, as a direct follow up to the Right2Water European Citizens' Initiative. The proposal follows the [REFIT Evaluation of the Drinking Water Directive](#) and is accompanied by an Impact Assessment and by WHO recommendations.

## **For More Information**

[Proposal for revised Directive](#)

[Impact Assessment](#) and [Executive summary of the impact assessment](#)

[Factsheet: Safer drinking water for all Europeans](#)

[Commission response to Right2Water Citizens' Initiative](#)

[European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

[Drinking Water Directive](#)

[EU Plastics Strategy](#)

[Review of the drinking water directive](#)

---

## [EU leads international efforts to ensure education for all](#)

Leaders from donor and developing countries are expected to commit to substantially increase their financing to accelerate progress towards achieving quality education for all.

Commissioner **Mimica** calls on the international community to reverse the current trend of declining financing for education: *“I am pleased to see so many political, corporate, philanthropic and civil society leaders here in Dakar to make the Global Partnership for Education stronger. Investing in quality education is key for addressing various sustainable development challenges, including health, sustainable growth, job creation and long-term peace and stability. I proudly recall the European Union’s early commitment to the GPE replenishment and invite all leaders to join us in shaping a better future while leaving no one behind.”*

The EU’s announcement in December 2017 to replenish the Global Partnership for Education with an [additional €100 million](#) is a clear sign of EU’s determination to help ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals achievement. This announcement came on top of €375 million already committed in 2014.

Through EU support, the GPE managed to achieve that:

- 72 million more children were in primary school in 2015 compared with 2002.
- 76% of children in GPE partner countries completed primary school in 2015 compared to 63% in 2002.
- The primary school completion rate for girls went up to 74% in 2015 compared to 57% in 2002.
- 78% of GPE partner countries maintained or increased their education budget at or above 20% of public expenditure in 2015.

### **Background**

The EU as a whole is the biggest contributor to the Global Partnership for

Education, providing 63% of its overall funds. *The EU is also a global leader in supporting [education in emergencies](#) through its humanitarian aid programmes, supporting millions of children in 50 countries around the world.*

Furthermore, the EU supports developing partner countries with bilateral support programmes for education worth around €3.4 billion, as well as €300 million for Vocational Education and Training and €1.4 billion for higher education (Erasmus+).

Many countries have made historically unprecedented progress in increasing enrolment. For example, Niger increased primary completion rates from 20% in 1999 to 69% in 2015.

In Ghana, GPE helped to improve policy and planning, and to strengthen school supervision and teacher training. The most recent grant targeted 75 of the most deprived districts helping to institutionalise in-service training and provide small grants to schools to upgrade their facilities and learning materials.

In Yemen, GPE supported the development of new science and math curricula, buy 35,000 school kits for distribution in areas where drop-out rates for girls are highest, train nearly 600 education specialists and social workers, create a recruitment strategy for female teachers to encourage girls to go to schools, and provide basic school furniture and supplies for 37,380 children.

#### **For More Information**

[Global Partnership for Education Replenishment 2020](#)

[Overview of EU's commitment to education in partner countries](#)

[Infographic on the Global Partnership for Education](#)

---

## **[Daily News 01 / 02 / 2018](#)**

### **Safer drinking water for all Europeans**

Today, the European Commission is proposing to revise the [EU Drinking Water Directive](#), to improve the quality and the access of citizens to drinking water, as well as provide better information to consumers. The right to access essential services of good quality, including water, is one of the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) unanimously proclaimed by European Leaders at the Gothenburg Summit. Today's legislative proposal will guarantee this right in practice, and thereby responds to the first-ever successful European Citizens' Initiative, "[Right2Water](#)", that gathered 1.6 million signatures in support of improving access to safe drinking water for all Europeans. In addition, this proposal seeks to empower consumers by

ensuring that water suppliers provide clearer information on consumption, cost structures and price per litre, allowing a comparison with the price of bottled water. This will contribute to the environmental goals of reducing plastic use and limiting the EU's carbon footprint, as well as meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. First Vice-President **Timmermans** and Commissioner **Vella** will present the proposal at a press conference at 12.30 CET which will be broadcast live [here](#). A [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and [factsheet](#) will be made available at the start of the press conference. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58 602)*

## **The Commission launches the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum**

The European Commission launched today the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum with the support of the European Parliament, represented by Jakob von Weizsäcker, responsible for the recent report on virtual currencies. The Blockchain Observatory and Forum will highlight key developments of the blockchain technology, promote European actors and reinforce European engagement with multiple stakeholders involved in blockchain activities. Blockchain technologies, which store blocks of information that are distributed across the network, are seen as a major breakthrough, as they bring about high levels of traceability and security in economic transactions online. They are expected to impact digital services and transform business models in a wide range of areas, such as healthcare, insurance, finance, energy, logistics, intellectual property rights management or government services. The Commission has been funding blockchain projects through the European Union's research programmes [FP7](#) and [Horizon 2020](#) since 2013. Until 2020, it will fund projects that could draw on blockchain technologies with up to €340 million. The [press release](#) and a [factsheet](#) are available online. The press point on the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum with Commissioner Mariya **Gabriel** and MEP Jakob von Weizsäcker from this morning can be watched on [EbS](#). *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Julia-Henriette Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)*

## **Key railway connection modernised in Bulgaria thanks to Cohesion policy investments**

€471.5 million from the [Cohesion Fund](#) is invested in the development of the railway section between the towns of Elin Pelin and Kostenets, in western Bulgaria. This section is part of the high speed railway line between the two largest Bulgarian cities; Sofia, the capital, and Plovdiv, on the [Orient/East Med corridor](#) of the trans-European transport network ([TEN-T](#)). This corridor crosses eight EU countries, from Berlin to Athens, creating important rail connections in central and southern European countries, meaning smoother travels and exchanges for Bulgaria and its neighbours. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *“Seamless railway connections for passengers and freight will boost regional development in Bulgaria, and contribute to building a competitive and low-carbon economy in the country for the next generations. I'm glad that the EU Cohesion Fund can be a part of*

it.” Over €100 million from the Cohesion Fund was invested in the Sofia-Plovdiv line in the 2007-2013 funding period, to build the section between the cities of Septemvri and Plovdiv. The Kostenets-Septemvri section is currently being financed by up to €151.5 million from the Connecting Europe Facility ([CEF](#)). Once works are completed on the Sofia-Plovdiv line, passengers will be able to travel between the two cities in less than 80 minutes at speeds of up to 160 km/h. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

### **The EU invests in clean and modern commuter train system in Hungary**

Almost €125.5 million from Cohesion Policy funds is invested in upgrade and electrification works on the railway line 2, linking the town of Esztergom to Hungary’s capital Budapest. The project also covers the costs of operating 12 new trains, to ensure more frequent service, and of upgraded signalling systems, to improve the traffic safety. It includes upgrading works in many of the line’s stations, for greater user comfort and smoother connections with regional bus systems, via an improved information system for passengers. “Europe continues to invest to improve the quality of life in Hungary, and in a very concrete way,” commented Regional Policy Commissioner Corina **Crețu**, “This EU co-financed project will contribute to reducing car congestion, to making the air purer and to offering commuters a clean, fast and comfortable transport system.” (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

### **L’Union européenne mobilise 15 millions d’euros pour Haïti**

La Commission européenne a annoncé aujourd’hui un programme d’aide de €15 millions pour la préparation aux catastrophes et le renforcement de la résilience à Haïti. «*Haïti est particulièrement vulnérable aux catastrophes naturelles et nous intensifions le soutien de l’UE pour aider à mieux préparer les populations locales. L’investissement dans la prévention et la préparation aujourd’hui pourra sauver des vies dans le futur*», a déclaré Christos **Stylianides**, commissaire européen chargé de l’aide humanitaire et de la gestion des crises. “*L’UE se tient aux côtés d’Haïti à travers notre soutien à la préparation aux situations d’urgence ainsi que des mesures en faveur du développement à plus long terme. Notre stratégie de réponse coordonnée aura un impact réel sur la vie de la population en assistant ceux qui en ont besoin et en améliorant leur résilience.*” a déclaré le commissaire européen à la coopération internationale et au développement, Neven **Mimica**. Ainsi, 5 millions d’euros permettront d’améliorer les capacités locales de préparation et d’intervention en cas de catastrophe dans les zones fortement exposées d’Haïti, afin de mieux anticiper et de faire face aux crises causées par la sécheresse, les cyclones, les épidémies et les inondations. Un montant supplémentaire de €10 millions sera alloué au projet “Pro-Resilience”, qui vise à améliorer les moyens de subsistance, la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle des ménages les plus vulnérables. La Commission européenne fournit à la fois une aide humanitaire et une aide au développement à Haïti,

qui est le principal bénéficiaire de l'aide de l'UE dans la région des Caraïbes et de l'Amérique latine. (*pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256*)

### **€50 million pilot project launched to support network of cybersecurity competence centres**

The Commission launched today a [call for proposals](#) for a €50 million pilot to support the creation of a network of cybersecurity competence centres across the EU. The winning consortia, including also university labs and research centres, should scale up existing research for the benefit of the cybersecurity of the Digital Single Market, with solutions that can be marketable. The experience collected in the selected projects will contribute to the design of the future competence network which will include a European Cybersecurity Research and Competence Centre. This pilot project was announced in [September 2017](#) together with a wide-ranging set of measures to equip Europe with the right tools to deal with cyber-attacks and to build strong cybersecurity in the EU. The project will be funded through the [Horizon 2020](#) Framework Programme. The call for proposals is open until 29 May 2018. Yesterday, the Commission also took another important step related to improving cybersecurity: as the Directive on security of network and information systems ([NIS Directive](#)) will have to be transposed by all Member States by 9 May, the Commission adopted an [implementing regulation](#) on digital service providers (i.e. cloud computing services, online marketplaces and search engines) and the severity of cybersecurity incidents. The NIS Directive is the first piece of EU legislation aimed at strengthening the EU's cyber-resilience. It supports the strengthening of national capabilities, establishes technical and strategic cooperation at EU level and introduces security and notification requirements. More information on the call for proposals is available [here](#) and an overview of Commission's cybersecurity actions [here](#). Further details on the transposition of the Directive on security of network and information systems can be read [here](#). (*For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698*)

### **Fighting animal and plant diseases: €154 million earmarked for 2018**

The Commission decided to allocate about €154 million to the fight against animal diseases and infectious diseases of animals that can be transmitted to humans as well as to support survey programmes for plant pests in 2018. "*Sums awarded today show that we are taking animal and plant health very seriously. They will help Member States' authorities to identify and act in a timely manner against outbreaks that could have a serious impact on animal and human health, economy and trade*", said Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. In the animal health area, €141 million was awarded to support the implementation of the 134 approved programmes for eradication, control and surveillance of diseases such as bovine tuberculosis, rabies,

bovine brucellosis, African swine fever and lumpy skin disease. In the plant health area, the EU has committed close to €13 million for 46 plant pest survey programmes in 24 Member States in 2018, with the greatest portion of the funds going towards the fight against *Xylella fastidiosa*, one of the most dangerous plant pests in the world. See online for more information on [National Veterinary Programmes](#) and [Survey Programmes](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

### **Migration: Number of asylum applications in the EU down by 43% in 2017**

New figures published today by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) show a significant decrease in the number of asylum applications made in the EU in 2017. In total, 706,913 asylum applications were recorded in EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland in 2017, a 43% decrease compared to 2016. It marks the second consecutive year with fewer asylum applications following the unprecedented number of arrivals during the refugee crisis. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos said: *“The significant drop in asylum applications in 2017 is a reflection of the overall reduction in the number of arrivals to the EU. The collective efforts undertaken by the European Union over the past years to better manage migration and protect our borders are showing results. The EU will continue to be the continent of solidarity, of openness and tolerance – but we need to do this in a more manageable way, together. Today’s figures show that we are on the right path.”* EASO is also today launching an interactive portal containing information and data relating to asylum trends in the EU. More information can be found in the [press release](#) issued today. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

#### **Future of EU finances – Commissioner Oettinger visits France and Hungary**

Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger**, in charge of Budget and Human Resources, is visiting France and Hungary on 1 and 2 February, respectively, as part of his tour across EU Member States (#MFFtour27) aimed at gathering views on the future of EU finances and the EU’s multiannual budget post-2020 (#EUBudget). In France, the Commissioner will attend the European Affairs and Finance Committee at the Joint Hearing Assemblée nationale and will have a meeting with Ms Sabine Thillaye, Chairperson of the European Affairs Committee, Assemblée nationale. Commissioner Oettinger will also meet Mr Alexis Kohler, Secretary-General of the Elysée Palace, and Mr Edouard Philippe, Prime Minister, in the presence of Ms Nathalie Loiseau, Minister for European Affairs. Last but not least, he will meet Ms Mari Kiviniemi, OECD Deputy Secretary General, and Ms Josée Touchette, OECD Executive Director. In Hungary, Commissioner Oettinger will meet Mr Mihály Varga, Minister for National Economy, Mr Péter Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade,



and the Chairperson and members of the Hungarian National Assembly's Committee on European Affairs and the Committee on Budgetary Affairs. He will also give the opening speech in a meeting on the future of cohesion policy upon invitation of Ministers responsible for cohesion policy from the so-called 'V4 + 4' countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), together with Ms Marianne **Thyssen**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Furthermore, both Commissioners will participate in a working lunch hosted by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The Commission kicked off this debate on 28 June 2017 with the publication of its [Reflection paper on the future of EU finances](#), available in all EU languages (also in [French](#) and [Hungarian](#)). Stakeholders' views will be taken into account when preparing the next MFF, to be presented in [May 2018](#). See a speech "[A Budget Matching our Ambitions](#)" given by Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger** at the conference "[Shaping our Future](#)" on 8 January 2018. *(For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

### **Commissioner Thyssen in Hungary**

Tomorrow, 2 February, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** will be in Budapest, Hungary, to participate in a meeting on Cohesion Policy upon invitation of Ministers responsible for cohesion policy from the so-called 'V4 + 4' countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia). The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss with the Ministers present the future of Cohesion Policy post-2020, and for the Commissioner to share her views on the future architecture of the European Social Fund (her speech will be made available [here](#)). Commissioner **Thyssen** will also meet with the Hungarian Minister for National Economy, Mr Mihály Varga, the Hungarian Minister of State of European Union Affairs, Mr Szabolcs Takács, as well as Mr Károly Cibere, Hungarian State Secretary for Social Affairs and Inclusion. *(For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)*

### **EU leads international efforts to ensure quality education for all**

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, attends the Global Partnership for Education Conference in Dakar, Senegal and calls on global leaders to step up their investment in education. Leaders from donor and developing countries are expected to commit to substantially increase their financing to accelerate progress towards achieving quality education for all. Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"I am pleased to see so many political, corporate, philanthropic and civil society leaders here in Dakar to make the Global Partnership for Education stronger. Investing in quality education is key for addressing various sustainable development challenges, including health, sustainable growth, job creation and long-term peace and stability. I proudly recall the European Union's early commitment to the GPE replenishment and invite all leaders to join us in shaping a better future*

*while leaving no one behind.*" The EU's announcement in December 2017 to replenish the Global Partnership for Education with an [additional €100 million](#) is a clear sign of EU's determination to help ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals achievement. More information in the [press release](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

### **Le Commissaire Moscovici en visite ce vendredi en Bretagne, France**

Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissaire pour les affaires économiques et financières, la fiscalité et les douanes, est en visite en Bretagne, France, demain le vendredi 2 février. Il commencera sa visite par la visite du chantier du métro de Rennes, financé par des fonds européens (Feder et prêt de la BEI) puis se rendra à la plateforme Excelcar, espace d'innovation collaborative de l'industrie automobile au service de l'emploi local, où il échangera avec les responsables de PME et de start-ups de cette plateforme, originaires de toute la Bretagne. En fin de matinée, il donnera une conférence de presse conjointe avec le Président de région, Loïg Chesnais-Girard. Elle sera suivie d'un [dialogue citoyen](#) intitulé "Europe-Bretagne : un destin économique commun ?" à 14h15. Ce dialogue sera [diffusé via Facebook live](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: [+32 229 56194](#); Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: [+32 229 58615](#); Enda McNamara – Tel.: [+32 229 64976](#))

### **Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety on official visit to Norway**

On 1-2 February Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety will pay an official visit to Norway. On Thursday, Commissioner **Andriukaitis** will hold a bilateral meeting with Mr Bent Høie, Minister of Health and Care Services and Ms Åse Michaelsen, Minister for the Elderly and Public Health. On Friday, he will meet Mr Jon Georg Dale, Minister of Agriculture and Food to discuss chronic wasting disease (CWD). The Commissioner will meet Norwegian European Reference Networks (ERN) participants to talk about Norwegian experience with the ERN cooperation. He will also attend the presentation of the Norwegian priorities in the area of eHealth. Later that day, together with Minister Høie he will attend the official event that marks the accreditation of Norway's team as part of Health Emergency Medical Teams coordinated by the European Union. *"Lessons learnt from Ebola and Zika clearly show the need for Europe to be more proactive and better prepared. Therefore I am particularly pleased that Norway's government is committed to developing an emergency medical team ready for deployment whenever needed. I am looking forward to learning more about it during my visit"*, said Commissioner **Andriukaitis** ahead of his visit. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

---

# [Press Release: EASO releases overview of 2017 EU+ asylum trends](#)

## **EU+ receives 43% fewer asylum applications in 2017**

*The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has published data on asylum trends in the EU+ in 2017 on a newly enhanced interactive portal. The results show a significant decrease in lodged applications for asylum compared with 2016, with 40% of decisions in 2017 being positive.*

In 2017, EU+ countries recorded 706,913 asylum applications <sup>[I]</sup>. This is a decrease of 43% compared to 2016, and the second consecutive year with fewer applications after the unprecedented influx in 2015 and 2016. Despite this decrease, the 2017 total remained at a slightly higher level than the number of applications lodged in 2014, indicating that the asylum-related inflow in the EU+ remained considerable.

**In the EU+ as a whole, monthly applications remained stable throughout the year.** The monthly number of applications varied from 49,042 in December to 66,443 in March. A seasonal trend, with higher numbers of applications over the summer, was less visible than in the previous three years. The stable trend at EU+ level, however, conceals stark variations at a country level.

About 55,000 applications, or 8% of the total, were **repeated applications** by persons who had already lodged an application previously in the same EU+ country. At least 3.5 % of all applications concerned claimed **unaccompanied minors (UAM)** <sup>[II]</sup>.

**Syria was the most common country of origin of applicants for the fifth consecutive year, with more than 98,000 applications.** Despite a considerable decrease compared to 2016, twice as many Syrians lodged an application for international protection in the EU+ as any other citizenship. Iraqi, Afghan and Nigerian nationals each lodged more than 40,000 applications in 2017. These four main countries of origin together constituted one in three applications throughout the EU+ in 2017. The top ten countries of origin also included **Pakistan, Eritrea, Albania, Bangladesh, Guinea and Iran**. Of these ten citizenships, only Bangladeshi and Guinean citizens lodged more applications in the EU+ in 2017 than in 2016.

## **Pending cases at end of 2017 halved from same period in 2016**

In 2017, EU+ countries issued 981,615 decisions at first instance, 13% fewer than in 2016 <sup>[III]</sup>. Despite the decrease, this was the second highest number of first instance decisions ever issued at a European level since data collection began in 2008 <sup>[IV]</sup>. In the EU+ as a whole, 40% of all decisions in first instance were positive <sup>[V]</sup>. This recognition rate was 17 percentage points lower than in 2016, a decrease which reflects the combined effect of a

higher number of decisions issued on cases with relatively lower recognition rates (such as Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan) and the concurrent decrease in the number of decisions issued to Syrian and Eritrean nationals, which are characterised by higher recognition rates.

**At the end of 2017, there were 462,532 applications awaiting a decision in first instance** <sup>[VI]</sup>. This is half the number of cases that were pending at the end of 2016 as a result of more first-instance decisions being issued in 2017 than asylum applications lodged. This decrease was reflected in most EU+ countries.

## **New enhanced [EASO web portal](#) for asylum data**

Coinciding with the publication of the data for 2017, EASO has launched a [newly enhanced and interactive portal](#) that allows for the general public and stakeholders to easily source customised information and data relating to asylum trends in the EU+. The data will be updated on a monthly basis.

*Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office by contacting [press@easo.europa.eu](mailto:press@easo.europa.eu)*

---

[I] The EU+ is composed of 28 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland. Data on applications for international protection were available for all 30 EU+ countries. Some monthly data were missing and these are estimated to represent approximately 1,000 applications.

[II] Claimed UAMs represent the asylum applicants claiming to be below the age of 18 years rather than those assessed to be such after an age assessment has been carried out. Several EU+ countries have difficulties reporting on claimed UAMs in the framework of the EPS data exchange. These figures should therefore be considered as underestimations of the actual proportion of claimed UAMs.

[III] Data on first-instance decisions were available for all 30 EU+ countries. Some monthly data were missing.

[IV] When Eurostat started to collect information on asylum decisions.

[V] The EU+ recognition rate includes EU-regulated forms of protection (refugee status and subsidiary protection) and excludes national protection forms (humanitarian reasons). It is calculated by dividing the number of positive first-instance decisions (granting refugee status or subsidiary protection) by the total number of decisions issued.

[VI] Data on pending cases were available for 29 EU+ countries. Some monthly data were missing.

---

## **[Remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at the European Financial Forum 2018 in Dublin](#)**

Honourable Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here at the Dublin Castle this evening. This castle stands on what used to be a strategic point, with views down the River Liffey. From here, potential dangers could be spotted.

Luckily, those days are long gone. But this is a fitting vantage point to discuss challenges and opportunities ahead for the financial sector.

Now, Ireland is a country that is open to the world. For example, it has an exceptionally high share of trade compared to GDP. It is also the fourth largest exporter of financial services in the EU.

Ireland has made a remarkable comeback since the crisis. This year, economic growth is forecast at almost four percent.

But there are also clouds on the horizon. Of all EU countries, Ireland has the closest geographic, historic, and economic links to the United Kingdom, so there is understandably concern about Brexit. This is a challenge that Europe will need to manage for years to come. But the European Union will continue to stand by Ireland in this process, and together we will overcome stumbling blocks one by one.

At the moment our main focus is on the negotiations for a transition-period. As we move on to define our future relationship, we should bear in mind that financial stability is best protected by coordinating rules and supervision – this is a lesson from the financial crisis.

Our financial markets may in the future be less integrated than today, but they will still have many ties. This requires maintaining strong convergence of rules and supervision in the EU and the UK. We are enhancing EU rules on equivalence, which is an important tool to ensure such convergence.

Whatever the outcome of the talks, financial firms should be prepared. Supervisors both in the EU and the UK are working with them to ensure this. Our most important common objective must be to preserve financial stability.

But let me today focus also on the opportunities the future holds for Ireland and the EU. The Commission see this country as a strong player – a dynamic financial centre within the European single market. Our work to build a Capital Markets Union will reinforce this position.

Tonight, I will use the example of the Irish funds management industry to make this point. I will then highlight our work to prepare Europe's financial sector for technological developments. And I will offer my first reactions on the final report of the High Level Expert Group on sustainable finance, which has been published today.

\* \* \*

Overall, the EU economy is outperforming expectations. The latest figures show that it grew by 2.5% in 2017. Economic sentiment in the EU is at its highest level since 2001. Unemployment is steadily decreasing, and Europe now has its highest level of employment ever.

Our main task ahead is to ensure that the benefits of this growth are felt by all Europeans. That is why we are focusing on inclusive growth and relaunching convergence among EU countries. This favourable economic background is a good opportunity to complete what we have started and ensure

that we have a resilient and well-functioning Economic and Monetary Union.

Our immediate priority is to complete the Banking Union. For this, we should move in parallel on risk reduction and risk sharing. All elements are on the table. On risk reduction, this includes our November 2016 bank reform package and our ongoing work to reduce Non-Performing Loans. On the risk sharing side, we recently came with ideas on how to unblock negotiations on the European Deposit Insurance Scheme. And we have broad support to finalise the work on the backstop for the Single Resolution Fund. So the time is ripe to move at political level on completing the Banking Union.

The second immediate priority for deepening the EMU is setting up the Capital Markets Union. Deeper capital markets across Europe will increase risk-sharing among private investors and improve the shock-absorption capacity of the economy. In the past three years, we have taken fundamental steps towards deeper and more integrated EU capital markets. Of the 33 actions we announced in 2015, 25 have now been completed.

One strength of Ireland's financial sector is asset management. As of September last year, Irish fund managers had more than €4.2 trillion assets under management. A true Capital Markets Union would enable Irish fund managers to further benefit from the full scale of the single market. In March of this year, revised rules for the EU venture capital label – EuVECA – will enter into application. Large managers can then run EuVECA funds, providing economies of scale and trusted brands. We have also expanded the range of eligible assets, and decreased the costs associated with cross-border marketing.

We are also looking more broadly at the rules for offering funds across the EU. This market is still predominantly organised along national lines. For example, 70% of the assets under management are held by funds available for sale in only one EU country. The share of alternative investment funds that is marketed in more than three countries is very low – only 3%. This spring we will present a proposal to address obstacles to the cross-border distribution of funds. We want to reduce the administrative burden and improve clarity for fund managers who want to market their funds across the EU. The aim is for a fund manager based in Dublin to be able to easily offer their funds in Riga, without compromising on investor protection.

\* \* \*

Another focus of the Capital Markets Union is to make sure that Europe seizes the opportunities of financial technology. That brings me to the topic of Fintech. As the largest user of information and communications technology, the financial sector stands to benefit enormously from the adoption of new technologies.

Europe has what it takes to develop a globally competitive Fintech sector. We can rely on our strengths in research and engineering. For example, we have 32 artificial intelligence research institutions in the world top 100, which is more than the US or China. I also see great Fintech potential here in Ireland, with its strong information technology culture.

But for us to become a Fintech superpower, we need to make sure that our companies are able to grow and scale up in Europe. If not, we risk driving them out of the EU and thereby losing valuable potential for creating economic growth in Europe. With this objective in mind, we will present in March an EU Action Plan on Fintech.

We will also present a legislative proposal to enable EU-wide crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending. This type of financing is crucial for innovative start-ups to access funding and get off the ground. Crowdfunding and peer-to-peer lending is growing rapidly across Europe. Yet it remains subject to differing and sometimes inconsistent national rules. This hinders platforms from reaching scale. To solve this, we will propose an EU-level passport for this sector.

In the global Fintech race, the pace of innovation is such that regulators and supervisors sometimes struggle to keep up. Some EU countries have innovation hubs, and some even have regulatory sandboxes. But for firms to scale up in Europe, we need to encourage all countries to create a safe space for start-ups to innovate under close supervision and tailored regulatory requirements.

To compare, financial centres such as Hong Kong and Singapore already have fully fledged sandboxes up and running. Despite our strong Fintech players and potential, Europe is still lagging behind. So we should start thinking about a common approach to sandboxes at EU level.

\* \* \*

The future of finance will not only be digital, it will also have to be green. So I would like to focus the rest of my speech on sustainable finance.

To limit global warming to well below 2 degrees, Europe will need an estimated €180 billion in additional yearly investments. Public money will not be enough. So we need to re-direct private capital towards investments in green and sustainable projects.

A year ago, the Commission appointed a high-level expert group on sustainable finance to elaborate a comprehensive set of proposals for the financial sector to support the transition to the low-carbon economy. To that end, this group of experts assessed the entire financial system to see where changes are needed.

Today they have published their final report. I believe this report is a manifesto for far-reaching reform. The Commission will use it to propose an EU strategy on sustainable finance in March, followed by several legislative proposals.

Let me refer to several recommendations:

- First, we need a unified EU classification system or taxonomy for sustainable assets. We need to define what is green and what is not green. And we need to identify the areas where sustainable investment is most needed and can make the biggest impact. A unified EU classification is fundamental

for the development of any green finance policy. We will follow up this recommendation with the first piece of legislation in spring.

- Second, as recommended in the report, we will present a proposal on fiduciary duty. It will clarify the need to take sustainability into account when managing money for others. Clients have the right to know how sustainable their investments are.
- Third, we could boost green investments and loans by introducing a so-called green supporting factor. This could be done at first stage by lowering capital requirements for certain climate-friendly investments, such as energy-efficient mortgages or low-carbon cars. However, this exercise would be delicate. Green does not mean risk-free. Any measures would have to be carefully calibrated, and based on a clear EU classification.
- Finally, further development of the green bond market can drive the investment that we need. With a unified classification system for sustainable assets, we could establish criteria and labels for green bonds and investment funds. These labels would help investors to easily identify financial products that comply with green or low-carbon criteria. We could extend the existing European Eco-label to financial products.

Our ambition is to inspire also other countries to act in favour of a sustainable global financial system.

I count also on your support for this major reform of the world of finance.

\* \* \*

Ladies and Gentlemen, We have already taken important steps towards a true European Capital Markets Union. And as the Irish say: Tús maith leath na hoibre. A good start is half the work.

Now we should finish what we have started, and prepare our financial sector for the future. Our success and prosperity will be determined by our ability to embrace and lead developments in a fast changing world.